Fought Over Castro Policies

Cuban Caught at Sea Says He Killed 5

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By John P. Stirn

MIAMI, Aug. 10 (UPI)—A pro-Castro Cuban sailor was picked up in the Atlantic in a lifeboat today and confessed that he killed the captain and four other crewmen of the ship Seven Seas when they disputed his political views.

A Federal officer, who asked that his name not be used, related the story told by Roberto Ramirez, who was found in the lifeboat by a German freighter about 60 miles south of Miami.

Ramirez carried a loaded revolver, knives and a supply of silver-tipped bullets, which he kept in a baby-food jar.

The Seven Seas, found drifting in the Florida Straits, had a crew of eight when it left port. In addition to Ramirez and the five who were slain, one man is still missing. Another survived by hiding in the anchor locker.

Coast Guard and Justice Department authorities sought to determine from the position of the Seven Seas in the Florida Straits who had jurisdiction in the case.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Aaron Foosaner indicated the incident may have occurred inside Florida waters and that murder charges probably would be filed Wednesday against the seaman.

Ramirez, wearing Bermuda shorts, a T-shirt and a grimy sport shirt over it, was spotted about 3 a.m. near Alligator Reef by the German freighter Bellavia.

He was the lone occupant of a motorless 14-foot lifeboat from the Seven Seas, the Coast Guard said, and waved to be taken aboard the German ship.

A Coast Guard patrol boat rendezvoused off Miami Beach with the freighter and removed Ramirez.

The seaman told interrogators from the Coast Guard and other Federal agencies, before he was whisked off to Immigration Service offices at Miami airport, a story that corroborated one told earlier by 17-year-old Honduran sailor Elvin Burywaise, whom the Coast Guard found aboard the drifting Seven Seas on Sunday.

The crewman unaccounted for was the ship's cook, Gerald Davison, another Honduran.

According to a Federal official present at the interrogation, Ramirez said he was at the wheel of the 175-foot coastal trader Saturday night as it steamed without cargo from Miami toward drydock in Tampa.

Ramirez said he had been engaged in a running argument with the captain, Rogelio Diaz, and First Mate Aldrick Hinds.

Ramirez said he was defending Cuba under the Castro regime, and the two officers were arguing against him. The Captain, Ramirez said, threatened him and then pulled a knife. The First Mate threatened to attack the Cuban, Ramirez said. Ramirez said he then pulled the .38 caliber pistol and shot Diaz and Hinds.

Ramirez said he went to the crew quarters and found three other men in their bunks who had been in the argument earlier.

From identifications given the Coast Guard by Burywise, these would have been Jose Abad, another Cuban and chief engineer; Franco Solomon, a Honduran and second engineer, and Antonio Fornier, a Cuban seaman.

Ramirez said he shot the men as they slept, the official said. Ramirez told the investigators he then returned to the bridge and threw the bodies of his skipper and first mate overboard.

Ramirez mentioned Burywise, but said he had not been in the argument and that he had no reason to harm him.